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REAGAN'S DR. STRANGELOVE

by Jonathan Alter

Every so often a certain kind of person involved in public affairs arouses within those who disagree an emotional response so strong, so angry, that you get a little curious about what it is that causes all the snorts and sighs when his name comes up.

One of those people in Washington right now is Richard Pipes, a Polish-born Harvard professor of Russian history. Pipes became important in 1976 when a team of hardline analysts he headed totally revised CIA estimates of Soviet strength. Since January he has been on leave from Harvard, serving at the White House as senior advisor on Soviet and Eastern European affairs, a critical National Security Council post.

Paul Warnke, an otherwise discreet Washington lawyer and former director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, says that some of Pipes's views on the Soviets are "just full of crap." Averell Harriman, irascible octogenarian that he is, went a little further than usual a couple of years ago when he advised a visitor that Pipes is "nothing but a damn fool." George

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Kistiakowsky, Eisenhower's science advisor and a well-known expert on arms control issues, told me something utterly libelous about Pipes, took it off the record, then added simply, "I can't rationalize the man for you—that's not possible."

Now, whenever something like this happens—and I've left out many similar examples—it's a good bet that either 1) the person in question has turned out to be at least partially right about a subject on which his critics were sure he was entirely wrong, or 2) he is in fact the arrogant ideologue his detractors claim, and he does in fact overstate his case to the point of being irresponsible if not dangerous.

It has to be admitted that Richard Pipes, superhawk, falls a little into the first category. Like other hardliners, he has at least some reason to feel a perverse sense of vindication over the course of U.S.-Soviet relations. For those more hopeful about detente, the invasion of Afghanistan was a double whammy—it was abhorrent in itself, but it also hurt a little to have to chalk one up for the Cassandras, whose dire warnings turned out to contain a grain of truth.

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